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ABSTRACT

Participants in a symposium on education in rural New York analyzed strengths and weaknesses and made policy suggestions relating to three broad goals: (1) create parity of access to lifelong educational and cultural opportunities for residents and institutions in rural areas; (2) enhance the quality of lifelong educational and cultural opportunities; and (3) maximize the effective use of available educational resources. Identification of strengths focused on the positive educational climate of rural schools, numerous existing educational institutions in rural areas, abundant opportunities for outdoor education, and a growing number of people who want to live in small communities and have their children attend small schools. Weaknesses included decline in rural per capita income in real dollars, insufficient educational services and opportunities, low pupil performance and aspiration, lack of summer opportunities for rural youth, stringent regulatory structure, and declining enrollments. Policy suggestions included greater incentives for rural instructional staff, creation of more responsive funding mechanisms, upgrading the professional work environment, and cooperative arrangements between all levels of education and the business community. (JHZ)

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ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN RURAL NEW YORK STATE: AN ACTION STRATEGY

NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON RURAL RESOURCES
SENATOR CHARLES D. COOK, CHAIRMAN

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INTRODUCTION

Presented herein is one of the nine reports of the Second Symposium of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources.

The first Symposium, held in 1983, began a process of both analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of Rural New York and establishing public policy goals which ought to be pursued.

Throughout 1984, the report of the first Symposium was scrutinized through a series of ten public hearings held across New York State.

A final report entitled "Rural New York in Transition" was published in January 1985. That report provided the raw material from which the Second Symposium began constructing an "Action Strategy for Rural New York."

The Second Symposium convened February 6, 7, and 8 at the Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, with more than 180 rural advocates from across upstate New York in attendance. In workshop sessions, Symposium participants hammered out a list of action responses to the problems which were placed before them in "Rural New York in Transition."

The results of their work are proudly and gratefully submitted herewith.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the special efforts of some 40 persons who performed leadership tasks.

These include: my collegues from the legislature who chaired the workshop groups; the staff personnel from both the Senate and Assembly, as well as from several administrative departments, who assisted with the planning and conduct of the Symposium; and, members of both the Commission staff and my own legislative staff who cooperated as clerical and technical support for the workshop leaders.

Whatever else may result from the Symposium, this report is testimony to the existence of a rich reservoir of dedicated, talented people who have a deep commitment to preserving the best of rural New York's heritage. Our progress thus far has been encouraging. It is important, however, that we continue moving forward in fully developing rural New York's considerable potential to improve the quality of life for the state as a whole.

Senator Charles D. Cook
Chairman
Legislative Commission on
Rural Resources

FOR YOUR HELP IN UNDERSTANDING THIS REPORT

This report is a working document rather than an historical account; therefore, it is constructed in a format that will enable you to follow the logical progression through which the final action recommendations have been formulated.

Participants at the second Symposium were asked to review the report entitled "Rural New York in Transition", henceforth to be referred to as "the report."

From the report, each workshop group was asked to identify three areas of concern toward which they would direct their attention. You will therefore find this document divided into those three categories. Throughout this publication, the numbering system is purely for ease of identification and does not signify any sequence either of importance or procedure.

Heading up each area of concern is a generalized goal.

The goal is then defined more specifically into two categories:

First are the assets and undeveloped potential of rural New York which are capable of being utilized more fully;

Second are identified problems and shortcomings which will be addressed.

Following, is a list of existing tools which can be used in achieving the goal. It is assumed that using whatever resources are at hand is the first step to be taken.

The last analytical step identifies those problems which will continue to be stumbling blocks in developing an effective strategy.

Finally, with a well-developed statement of purpose, the Symposium workshops put aside the survey report and began to formulate a response to the purpose they had defined.

Even though each workshop group was presented with an outline of procedure, the differences in subject matter and the divergence in group dynamics which developed in the respective workshops resulted in differing formats for the recommendations which were developed. These are presented in basically unedited form for your consideration and comment.

At several points in the above presentation, the Commission has inserted material from the 1984 public hearings which clarify or expand upon the basic item under consideration.

FOCUS ON ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

GOAL STATEMENT ONE

Create parity of access to lifelong educational and cultural opportunities for residents and institutions in rural areas.

Related Strengths and Assets

- The rural school is a focal point of community life:

  - In addition to its traditional role, the school is a source for social activities and cultural enrichment;

  - Pride in school and community is prevalent. Many rural residents remain steadfast in their opposition to school district consolidation, especially at the elementary level, because of their desire to keep schools within the community.

Please realize that small K through 12 buildings that were built years ago, and have been maintained rather well by people in their community, are a center of social interaction. It's the place where tremendous numbers of activities take place. It has become a terribly important symbol to the people it has served and their identity with that K-12 district is very, very strong. They are more apt to share students with other districts. My perception is they are less apt to join and consolidate.

Robert Loretan
District Superintendent
Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES

Rural schools usually serve a dual purpose. They not only provide the educational needs of their pupils, but also must assume a key role in the life and vitality of the communities they serve. Education is only one element of the rural development that we seek, but it is a force that I believe shapes others.

Robert J. Maurer
Executive Deputy Commissioner
New York State Education Department

- The positive educational climate found in small, rural schools encourages student participation in the learning process.

- Slower pace of rural life allows change to occur more slowly than in metropolitan communities. There is less transience in rural areas, thus providing greater continuity for residents.

- A new wave of communications technology offers great potential for rural school districts by reducing information distances and increasing access to financial and instructional resources.

FOCUS ON ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

New technologies provide an unprecedented chance to improve lifelong education. They afford the best opportunities we've have ever had to increase quality, productivity, and enhance equitable access for students, whether homebound or in rural school districts or urban ones. In addition, it can help learners of all ages, particularly the aged and those who require retraining because of shifts in our industrial base.

Gregory Benson, Jr.
Director
Center for Learning Technologies
New York State Education Department

- Myriad of existing educational institutions in rural areas:

  - The State University of New York is the largest and most diverse public multi-campus university system in the world. Of its 64 campuses, 36 are located in rural regions;

  - The independent sector of higher education in New York State, comprised of over 100 campuses offering a variety of disciplines and programs, is the largest in the nation. Twenty-eight of these institutions are located in rural counties throughout New York State.

  - The 400 out of 724 public school districts in the state that serve rural New York.

  - Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) enhance the quality of education through shared services. Of the 43 BOCES in New York State, 26 serve rural regions;

  - Specialized institutions, such as teacher training and environmental learning centers increase the availability of in-service opportunities for rural educators;

  - Rural libraries are often providers of counseling services for undereducated adults, of opportunities to learn about local and regional history, arts and culture, and of information about community services, public affairs, and cultural events.

  - Museums and historical societies help educate rural residents about local and regional history, while also providing an important link with the past.

Related Strengths and Assets (Cont'd.)

New York State's network of colleges and universities is rich in its geographic and academic diversity. It is able to devote its impressive talents and resources to building a robust present and future throughout New York State.

Seldon Kruger
President
Delhi Agricultural & Technical College

- The local media is responsive to educational issues and serves as an important source of information in many rural communities throughout New York State. The media also is instrumental in heightening awareness and generating public support for required programs and services.

I commend your recognition of the considerable potential for rural schools to assist in the development of economic and social services in a small town. Too many in our state fail to see this aspect of the value of improving rural schools. In addition, improving the economic life of our small communities must be seen as a legitimate concern for all New York State residents. If no real job opportunities exist locally, the cycle won't run as it should because new graduates must leave the area to find decent jobs.

Charles Davis
Davis/McDonald Associates

- Increasing organizational alternatives for rural school districts have posed legitimate answers to traditional school district consolidation.

Some of the alternatives other than reorganization that should be explored include:

- The use of BOCES for shared teachers, classes, and facilities beyond what we already have been doing;
- Clustering of schools for certain purposes, such as offering advanced electives, sharing equipment, rooms, etc.;
- The use of technology to bring new and different learning opportunities to rural youth;

- Cooperating with colleges and universities to provide expanded courses to high school youth.

The rural school is often the center of community life, and no outside force should determine its testing. I support incentives to partial and total reorganization. I oppose mandates.

Edward Huntington
District Superintendent
Washington-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES

- Influx of new residents into rural communities often has a positive impact upon the quality of education.

FOCUS ON ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Impediments and Related Weaknesses

- Duplication and fragmentation hamper the delivery of educational services in rural areas.

- Inherent limitations of rural school districts:

  - Program offerings/staff;

  - Aspirations levels of rural residents;

  - Geography and relative isolation of population (e.g., school district consolidation impacts more severely on student transportation in rural areas);

  - Access to cultural resources;

  - Financial base.

The new technologies are transforming every work place and every occupation. No student should be denied access to educational opportunity to acquire necessary skills and knowledge to secure gainful employment and become a productive citizen in this new era. Generally, we have found that higher wealth districts provide students an almost 100 percent advantage regarding access to computers than lower wealth districts do.

Robert J. Maurer
Executive Deputy Commissioner
New York State Education Department

There are two factors at play in the case of a school district's limited financial base. First, the rural districts face higher costs than do other districts. In other words, it costs more to do the same thing in a rural district than it does in an otherwise equivalent district and these differences in cost have been alluded to by other speakers. They stem primarily from diseconomies of small scale operation. The second point is that expenditure levels in rural districts are lower than elsewhere. Part of this is due to cost of living differences, but even when you control for the cost of living across regions of the state, you still find that the rural districts spend at lower levels on a per pupil basis.

David Monk
Assistant Professor for Educational
Administration
Cornell University

I do wish that the wording on such facts dealing with increases in rural property values could be accompanied by an explanatory phrase or adjective to make clear that these paper values are beyond the control of the working man. They're also about as meaningful to him as a report on what is happening to the price of tickets to the Metropolitan Opera.

Sloppy and outdated equalization and assessment practices have been a major focus of my attention for many years, and they remain a real enemy of the value and quality of rural life.

Charles Davis
Davis/McDonald Associates

- Per capita income has declined in real dollars:

  - Property values in rural counties have increased dramatically, and contributed to an overall ballooning in apparent "paper wealth". This problem is further exacerbated by the lack of currency in assessment and equalization rate data as well as inadequate local property assessment practices.

  - This situation has led to serious financial problems for rural taxpayers as well as a backlash from a growing proportion of rural residents who are reluctant to pay school taxes because they do not have school-age children.

We have found that rural school districts make more tax effort to provide education than do non-rural districts. In fact, this discrepancy between the rural and non-rural districts in New York State has been increasing over time. The rural districts are spending a larger percentage of their local income on education relative to the non-rural districts. It seems to me that a more reasonable explanation for the low expenditure levels that we observe in rural districts would place at least some emphasis on the low levels of income that exist in many rural districts.

David Monk
Assistant Professor of Educational Administration
Cornell University

The economic difficulties experienced by the farmer also affect the school. As pointed out in the Commission report, the change in assessments has created paper wealth for rural areas and in no way does this reflect the actual economic problems of those involved in agriculture. The deteriorating condition of the farmer has tended to erode the traditional support that our agricultural community has shown for the public schools. If the current plight of the farmer continues, we can expect more budget defeats with a greater degree of frequency in the future.

Lawrence Kiley
Superintendent of Schools
Union Springs Central School District

Impediments and Related Weaknesses (Cont'd.)

- Insufficient availability of state-of-the art communications technology which might otherwise provide rural school districts, plagued by limited access to resources, with innovative programming and networking opportunities.

- Lack of awareness among rural residents as to the range of lifelong educational program offerings available to them.

- Disproportionate rise in private school enrollment could erode support for public education.

- Economic inequality of rural residents as compared with their metropolitan contemporaries. The real personal income level is low in rural areas, which is exacerbated by the higher unit costs of providing education in small, geographically sparce school districts.

There are so many discrepancies in determining what wealth is and whether it comes from income. The fact that we have a difficult time identifying what wealth there is through the income tax is caused by the privacy of the individual. Also some properties have been sold for substantial sums of money. All of a sudden because something is coming into a rural neighborhood, it enhances the value of everybody else's property, but it doesn't change the potential for that person who may be living on a fixed income.

Robert McCarthy
Superintendent of Schools
Geneseo School District

- Limited aspiration levels of rural residents are further hampered by resistance to change, and, in some instances, an insular and parochial approach to problem-solving.

Rural areas have a high percentage of adults who have not graduated from high school in New York State according to the latest census. Only the cities located in the State's SMSA's have a higher average percentage.

Robert J. Maurer
Executive Deputy Commissioner
New York State Education Department

- Uncertain thrust of vocational education:

- Reduced access to educational re-training, particularly because of high costs for adults attending BOCES institutions;

- Reluctance of taxpayers to support skills training that could otherwise be acquired on-the-job;

- "Pigeon-holing" of opportunities for vocational education students (e.g., many BOCES students in rural areas are unaware of the numerous opportunities for further technical training available at the post-secondary level).

- Limited opportunties for education during summer months for students in rural school districts.

- The impact of an increasing population of "rural disadvantaged":

  - This problem is often masked by the "idyllic" natural environment of rural communities;

  - Children from broken homes are becoming the ones who are most difficult to educate in rural areas.

I would suspect that the root cause of social problems in rural areas is economics. This subsequently is evidenced in alcohol abuse as well as abuse to family members, children, husbands, and wives. I take very seriously the role of the schools in keeping their eyes open for those youngsters who might be falling between the cracks. The school should let students know if they are feeling very badly and believe their is no one they can turn to, that they can indeed come to a guidance counselor or teacher.

George Mack
Superintendent of Schools
Walton Central School District

- Insufficient educational services and opportunities for rural populations as well as the generally low pupil performance and aspiration levels that accompany a lack of such services:

  - This problem is fueled by the geographic sparsity of rural school districts, the limited number of students populating such areas, and the high cost per unit of service delivery to students in such communities.

Impediments and Related Weaknesses (Cont'd.)

- Regardless of their size or sparsity, state operating aid comprises a smaller fraction of rural school districts' approved educational expenditures than a decade ago.

In school districts below 1,000 students and particularly those below 500, you see the PEP test scores tending to be lower. More and more of these students are falling below the statewide reference point.

David Monk
Assistant Professor for Educational Administration
Cornell University

FOCUS ON ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Policy Suggestions

The following proposals detail the specific programs that need to be enacted in response to the impediments and related weaknesses described in the previous section, and which capitalize on the strengths of rural schools.

I. In response to the disparity of access to individual learning opportunities in rural areas, it is proposed to create greater incentives for rural instructional staff and to provide greater flexibility in the research, development, and pursuit of creative instructional projects. Support mechanisms for children from broken homes should be enhanced. Additionally, cultural enrichment, including libraries, should be expanded. These initiatives will be accomplished through the development of a new formulation for determining wealth which serves as a key determinant of revenue distribution. In addition, the current property assessment system should be upgraded. Particular attention should be given to the identification of "rural disadvantaged areas" in efforts to create new, more responsive funding mechanisms. The resources of private institutions should also be tapped in the effort to mobilize community effort in lifelong learning. The Governor and state legislature will be responsible for the design and approval of this program.

The utilization of technology on a cooperative basis cannot be over-emphasized. The isolation and limited course offerings experienced by most rural school students can be best, if not only, overcome through the use of advanced technology in a cooperative setting. Interactive telecommunications, enabling several individual and/or several small groups of students in a large geographic region to have access to the talents of an extremely competent instructor utilizing the finest teaching aids, looms as a real possibility for rural school districts. Technology in a cooperative mode is the only logical method to open the world to students in isolated school districts in a manner which is both cost-efficient and program-effective.

Ronald Poletto
District Superintendent
Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga BOCES

FOCUS ON QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Goal Statement Two

Enhance the quality of lifelong educational and cultural opportunities for residents and institutions in rural areas.

FOCUS ON QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Related Strengths and Assets

- The diversity of and proximity to New York State's natural resources plays an influential role in the education of rural students:

  - The "natural laboratory-like qualities" of rural areas enable students to receive first-hand exposure to the environment.

- Interaction between "school family" and rural communities:

  - The congeniality and friendliness between teachers and parents, who very often find themselves as neighbors with similar interests, has a positive effect on students.

In the case of a graduate of our school system who was recently interviewed for a highly classified and responsible position within the United States Department of Defense, the personnel officer who conducted the interview offered the following comment. "We look for students from small towns and small schools. They tend to demonstrate a high level of dedication, responsibility, and self-reliance."

Lawrence Kiley
Superintendent of Schools
Union Springs Central School District

Two major strengths of rural schools are community involvement with the school and the one-on-one relationship between students and teachers found in these schools.

Jim Reagen
Ogdensburg Journal

- The small community and the small elementary school are popular with an increasing number of parents.

In a recently conducted biennial census of our school district, the census taker pointed out that there are 147 new youngsters, aged zero to four living in the district. Many of the parents of these children have moved into the district within the last two years. When questioned as to the reason for their move, a vast majority cited the quality of education offered by a smaller rural school district as the major factor.

Lawrence Kiley
Superintendent of Schools
Union Springs Central School District

FOCUS ON QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

- Rural residents are generally amenable to try new ideas or innovative approaches to education.

- The positive educational climate found in rural schools encourages student participation in the learning process:

  - The "natural laboratory-like qualities" of rural areas enable students to receive first-hand exposure to the environment;

  - The informal nature of small-town politics afford students a chance to understand and actively participate in local government.

- Recent adoption of the New York State Regents Action Plan is a positive step toward increasing the educational background of high school graduates, particularly those who are college bound. Implementation of the Plan does pose some serious problems for rural schools however, namely:

  - Staffing to meet new curricular requirements, especially in the languages;

  - Scheduling students into required courses since small schools cannot afford extra sections. This will have adverse consequences for vocational/occupational students as well;

  - Limited resources necessary to add required courses involving extensive start-up costs (e.g., Chemistry amd Physics labs), and/or to remain contemporary in state-of-the-art instructional equipment and technology.

It's terribly expensive to offer such electives as fourth year foreign language, calculus, advanced science, et cetera, when class sizes may be less than ten or even five. The problem extends to staff recruitment. Rural schools have generally not been able to provide competitive salaries, and teachers prefer to teach in a school where they are required to make one or two class preparations rather than four or five.

Edward Huntington
District Superintendent
Washington-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES

Impediments and Related Weaknesses

- Insufficient career guidance for students in rural communities. For example, many students are dissuaded from pursuing a college education. In addition, students are generally unaware of the numerous agricultural opportunities, other than farming, available to them.

We have got to spend time talking about what are our expectations of guidance. What do we want our counselors to do? They push papers. They do master schedules and assign kids. Do they really counsel? Do guidance counselors receive the training which enables them to effectively deal with the problems and concerns of today's youth?

Robert Loretan
District Superintendent
Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES

- Availability of quality educational and administrative personnel in rural school districts, particularly due to low salaries and limited employment opportunities for both spouses.

- Stringent regulatory structure allows rural school districts little flexibility in the utilization of the financial resources available to them.

- Insufficient integration among educational institutions and private enterprise.

- Lack of summer educational and employment opportunities for rural youth.

- Increase in dependent population.

FOCUS ON QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

- Small and rural school finance:

  - A sparcity factor is required in state funding of public education because it costs more per student to initiate and operate a program in a small school than it does in a large school;

  - A progressive formula for transportation funding is required because the geographic size of some rural school districts is so extensive that it creates a disproportionate cost per student burden on schools with relatively small budgets;

  - Special state aid for districts with relatively large tax-exempt property bases is required because their ability to raise monies in order meet the Regent's Action Plan requirements is severely limited;

  - A student enrollment averaging methodology (similiar to income averaging) is required in state-aid funding of small schools in order to offset the very serious impact that relatively small changes in enrollment have on a rural school district's capability to offer required courses;

  - There is a significant economic inequality of rural residents as compared to their metroploitan contemporaries. This fact must be reflected in state-aid formulas for the support of public schools. Additionally, the inaccuracy of personal income data collection (particularly in rural areas) needs to be corrected by improved data collection methods. Lack of currency in equalization rate calculations and inaccuracies in local property assessment practices are also a problem in developing equitable funding methods for rural areas.

In studies in our district, we have found that in the classrooms below grade 4 enrollments are beginning to pick up a little. I think that our projections show no more decline at the elementary level in our schools. However, the decline is really coming in Grades 7 to 12 for the next 8 years.

Lawrewnce Kiley
Superintendent of Schools
Union Springs Central
School District

Impediments and Related Weaknesses (Cont'd.)

Predominantly rural areas have unique school district attributes and socioeconomic characteristicts since such areas contain most of the low wealth, low spending school districts in the state. Districts in these areas have a per pupil expenditure level that is more than 15 percent below the statewide average. Average income levels are also lower than those in the state as a whole.

David Monk
Assistant Professor for
Educational Administration
Cornell University

For school aid, the 1980 State Board of Equalization and Assessment survey has not been used. It will first be used this year, the 1985-86 school year. We will use the 1980 information all the way to 1989-90 and this lag time becomes very critical to rural school districts. It has a very dramatic impact upon them. In essence what is happening is that over time, we are becoming increasingly out of date.

David Gaskell
Executive Director
New York State Division of
Equalization and Assessment

Policy Suggestions

The following proposals detail the specific programs that need to be enacted in response to the impediments and related weaknesses described in the previous section, and which capitalize on the strengths of rural schools.

I. In response to the need to improve the quality of educational and cultural opportunities, it is proposed to create an environment that attracts and retains high quality educational and cultural professionals in rural areas. Specific attention should be given to the professional work environment, in-service training, and continuing education opportunities. Efforts to undertake research, disseminate and apply techniques that "work" particularly well in rural settings should be promoted. Guidance counseling at the elementary and secondary school levels in rural areas should be improved. Poor and deteriorating institutional facilities should be repaired and upgraded to modern standards. These initiatives will be developed through increased state resources targeted toward rural areas and creation of a state fund for the improvement of rural education. Additionally, an operating aid formula should be developed that addresses the inequality of rural educational and cultural financing, including placing more emphasis on the use of current equalization rates and accurate personal income data. The Commissioner of Education, legislative and executive branches of state government, the State Education Department (administrator) and regional planning groups will be involved in the aforementioned projects, scheduled to begin during the first legislative session following approval of the regional plans. State matching funds and technical assistance should be provided in order to prepare the regional plans. Maximum effort will be made to secure local input and public-private involvement in the development of the plans, followed by appropriate state and local follow-up action.

Information available through telecommunications is of particular importance in rural communities because of distance and difficulties of mobility, particularly during the winter months, thus requiring decentralized alternatives. The computer and electronic communications provide a ready and useful tool both for access to essential information and as an alternative to the classroom.

Jerome Komisar
Provost
State University of New York
Central Administration

FOCUS ON PRODUCTIVITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Goal Statement Three

Maximize the effective utilization of available educational resources.

Related Strengths and Assets

- The informal and close-knit nature of communication channels in rural communities often fosters close linkages between educational and cultural institutions.

- A strong, unified rural population has the potential to impact significantly upon the future allocation of funding and other educational resources in New York State.

- Already existing educational linkages and networks enhance the delivery of services to rural school districts.

- Historically, there has been insufficient autonomy and management flexibilty for State University of New York institutions. This situation is particularly inappropriate for the current era. The Legislature in the 1985 session took steps to add greater management flexibility to SUNY operations. Still, additional reforms are required in order to meet fiscal and educational challenges in the coming decade.

New York imposes more restrictions on the expenditures of appropriated funds than almost any other state in the union. The result is not greater cost-effectiveness, but rather an adherence to administrative processes that tend to errode managerial creativity and that fail to take into consideration essential differences in local settings and specific institutional needs. Greater autonomy and flexibility in fund expenditure would permit SUNY campuses to be far more responsive to students and communities while still providing ample safeguards that tax dollars are being expended strictly in the public interest.

Jerome Komisar
Provost
State University of New York
Central Administration

FOCUS ON PRODUCTIVITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Impediments and Related Weaknesses

- There is uncertainty as to where future vocational education should take place - at the BOCES, community college, or Agricultural and Technical College level, or a combination of all three:

  - It has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the academic program and clientle of the Agricultural and Technical Colleges and the community colleges;

  - Vocational education facilities are sometimes duplicative and costly in their programs.

- Declining enrollments have more seriously impacted on programs in rural schools, thereby limiting the potential of cost-effective delivery systems:

  - This presents an increased burden to the rural taxpayer since small or sparsely populated districts must increase the fraction of their local income spent on education faster than their metropolitan cousins;

  - Since rural school districts tend to be small, even a slight reduction (e.g., 20 or 30 students) can be significant.

The impact of enrollment reduction on a small rural school is just unbelievable when compared to a city-based school, and something needs to be done about that. The most important problem in rural school districts associated with enrollment is program offerings. While the requirements placed upon a school district by the recently-adopted Regents Action Plan are very demanding, these requirements will prove to be more difficult for the small, rural school district than for the larger suburban or urban school district. One only has to review the second language, technology, and advanced placement course requirements to conclude that student enrollment plays a key role. School districts with limited enrollments per grade level will experience significantly greater difficulty in achieving the Regents Action Plan requirements than will school districts with several classes per grade level.

Ronald Poletto
District Superintendent
Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga BOCES

- A stringent regulatory framework has limited the flexibility of rural school districts to utilize the financial resources available to them.

Rural variables make it impossible to fit school districts into neat categories, let alone an overall pattern, with large city and suburban districts. Laws and regulations need to be designed not only for the average district, but with flexibility to best serve all types of districts. Currently, rural districts have the greatest difficulty fitting this average pattern.

Kermit Huttar
Board of Education Member
Port Byron Central School District

We suggest a change in the system of educational finance which now relies primarily on property values and contains limited flexibility for a variety of schools in rural New York State. Factors such as the true impact of enrollment decline, geographic sparsity, the effects of increasing tax exemptions, and education for the handicapped should be considered in an attempt to equalize state support for rural schools.

Robert McCarthy
Superintendent of Schools
Geneseo School District

- General absence of a comprehensive, cooperative strategy among public and private educational institutions and providers has limited the effectiveness of long-range planning for rural New York's educational delivery system.

- Complacency of local leaders to address both long-standing and current educational issues and problems in rural areas, partially attributable to feelings of powerlessness and an aversion to risk-taking.

Policy Suggestions

The following proposals detail the specific programs that need to be enacted in response to the impediments and related weaknesses described in the previous section, and which capitalize on the strengths of rural schools.

In response to the need to promote public and private cooperative relationships among elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and continuing and cultural institutions, it is proposed to strengthen the partnership between post-secondary education and the private sector in order to provide skills and training. Cooperative arrangements between all levels of education and the business community should be enhanced, including institutional resource collection development. These initiatives will be implemented by fostering inter-institutional cooperation through incentive aid; by providing SUNY campuses with greater management and fiscal autonomy, and through assistance of the media in promoting awareness of the importance of public-private cooperation.

The regional basis will be employed to establish financial incentive programs that encourage the development of comprehensive planning, cooperative institutional programs, and technological assessment.

These initial planning incentives will be predicated on evidence that the regions have convened the key regional representatives, reviewed current education capacities, and specified next planning steps. Additional financial incentives will be available for regional program implementation based on completion of an approved plan and local (regional) commitment for its implementation.

The regional planning organizations will include rural representatives from the areas of business, local government, education, and citizens-at-large. These representatives will be nominated and names submitted by appropriate executive officials in each sector. The group will be co-chaired by representatives of the public and private sectors and the executive secretary will be the Regional Education Director. Appropriate educational and cultural institutions to be represented include: local school districts, BOCES, libraries and museums, Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation, community colleges, agricultural and technical colleges, four-year colleges and universities, the private sector, public broadcasting stations, and community-based organizations. Periodic

reporting of progress will be made to the Commission on Rural Resources. The Commission will also coordinate efforts to involve the media in promoting awareness of the need for public-private cooperation.

A convener will be designated to call the first organizational meeting in as yet to be determined regions.

The plans for the elementary and secondary program areas will be implemented by the state legislature, Education Department, and Board of Regents and be provided with adequate state funding and support. The Governor and Legislature will be responsible for designing and approving the SUNY autonomy proposal.

Working together with many concerned citizens from all walks of life will enable us to focus increasing attention on those who need it desperately, the students in small rural school districts.

Charles Davis
Davis/McDonald Associates

Skilled workers are the key to higher productivity and a greater ability to compete in world markets. Quality education for all students is essential and we can only succeed if we establish new partnerships between our business and educational communities. If business wants its needs met, it is going to have to meet the needs of the schools.

Governor Pierre du Pont
State of Delaware

Meeting the information needs of rural America requires a new partnership between education and business. This new partnership requires a more thorough merging of the interests of telecommunications providers and educational institutions. Videotex and other new computer-based information technologies will change the role of librarians, the role of teachers, and the nature of institutionalized education.

William R. Oates
School of Communications
University of Alabama

Technology and communications may also provide the vehicle for school districts to pursue indepth programs and pooling of services. Districts should explore the electronic sharing of small enrollment, but necessarily in-depth, course offerings.

Policy Suggestions (Cont'd.)

This kind of sharing should qualify for adequate incentive aid under newly defined school legislation which would expand the options for the sharing and combining of services to those districts.

Robert McCarthy
Superintendent of Schools
Geneseo School District

We need the opportunity to be more innovative. Innovation needs to be supported by new financing structures and we suggest that the incentive aid be expanded to facilitate a reorganization of resources as well as the physical reorganization of school districts.

Charlotte Gregory
Superintendent of Schools
Schoharie Central School District

We as educators are concerned with the quality of life in rural areas, not only because our institutions are located in them, but because we live in them. Unfortunately, our campuses are underutilized in this particular regard. It is our hope, particularly with respect to rural campuses of the State University system, that we will be given the authority, flexibility, and freedom for discretionary judgment to do what we know should be done.

Seldon Kruger
President
Delhi Agricultural and Technical College

ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY, AND HIGHER EDUCATION WORKSHOP

John G.A. O'Neil
Assemblyman
Workshop Moderator

Greg Benson
Director
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Workshop Facilitator

Virginia Barton
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